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U.S. senators questioning war rationale

Unconventional weapons elude searchers

By TIMOTHY APPLEBY
With a report from Associated Press

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Monday, May. 26, 2003

Weapons, weapons everywhere, but not a vial of nerve gas or anthrax in sight. Six weeks after the fall of Baghdad, the U.S. occupiers of Iraq find themselves struggling with a unique, two-pronged challenge whose scope seemed to widen yesterday.

On the one hand, lawless Iraq is awash in deadly ordnance -- handguns, hunting rifles, shotguns, automatic AK-47s, hand grenades, shoulder-fired missiles and much else. In Baghdad alone, as part of its recently announced decommissioning drive, the U.S. military yesterday hauled away 58 tonnes of guns and ammunition.

That brought the total seized in the city to more than 4,870 tonnes -- just a part of what is on the streets, by most estimates.

In Washington, however, a far more elusive type of weapon was again drawing scrutiny: ousted president Saddam Hussein's supposedly formidable arsenal of biological and chemical arms, which, together with his alleged plans for a nuclear bomb, comprised the chief stated rationale for invading Iraq.

In his State of the Union address last year, U.S. President George W. Bush told the world that Mr. Hussein possessed 25,000 litres of anthrax -- "enough to kill several million people." The Iraqi dictator might also have 38,000 litres of botulinum toxin, Mr. Bush said, sufficient to wipe out several million more. Moreover, the President speculated, the regime might be concealing 500 tonnes of poison gas, together with "upwards of 30,000 munitions" capable of delivering it.

Yet despite a vigorous postwar hunt, no sign of the banned weapons has turned up, and senior Democratic senators took to the airwaves yesterday to suggest Mr. Bush's administration had either relied on flawed intelligence or deliberately misrepresented the Iraqi threat.

Joseph Biden, the top Democrat on the Senate foreign-relations committee, said the White House had "hyped" the risk posed by Iraq.

"We hyped nuclear, we hyped al-Qaeda, we hyped the ability to disperse and use these weapons," he told NBC television's *Meet the Press*.

Jay Rockefeller, the Senate intelligence committee's ranking Democrat, said on the same program that whether Iraq's weapons program was exaggerated or merely misunderstood, "in either case, it's a very bad outcome."

Republican Senator Pat Roberts, who heads the intelligence committee, predicted unconventional weapons will yet be found. But if they are not, he said, "basically, you have a real credibility problem."

Reflecting that worry, hundreds of U.S. weapons-hunters scouring Iraq -- their United Nations

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examining dozens of previously identified potential sites, the teams are now gathering their own intelligence through interviews with Iraqi scientists, factory workers and others.

One frustrated American officer told The Associated Press yesterday that the U.S. military originally anticipated finding caches of banned weapons so huge that the chief concern was whether there would be sufficient resources to destroy them.

"It never occurred to anyone, not even for 10 seconds, that we wouldn't find any," said a captain commanding a search team.

Locating the other type of weapon the U.S. wants to seize -- automatic rifles and anything larger -- is easier. Guns have long been popular in Iraq and Mr. Hussein's Baathist regime, unlike other police states, allowed citizens to own them.

Rounding up those guns, however, could prove a major headache for the administration. Under new regulations, most citizens will be allowed handguns, rifles and shotguns for their protection, but not military explosives or the ubiquitous AK-47 automatic assault rifle.

After June 14, possession of an unauthorized weapon will be a criminal offence.

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May 27, 2003

RUMMY STEPS ON HIS OWN

We may be seeing right now a rare misstep by Donald Rumsfeld, the only bureaucrat slimy enough to have outmaneuvered Henry Kissinger.

It comes about because of what Cole Porter once called "the self-deception that believes the lie." Rumsfeld and his co-conspirators, Perle and Wolfowitz and Cheney and Bush, were so desperate to go to war with Iraq that they put their trust in Ahmad Chalabi, an Iraqi exile wanted for bank fraud in Jordan and elsewhere.

Like any good con man, Chalabi told them what they wanted to hear: that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction piled all over the place and furthermore was a staunch ally of Osama bin Laden.

Cooler heads, many of them at George Tenet's CIA, pointed out to the White House that Osama and Saddam were mortal enemies, and that there was no good reason to think Iraq had gone nuclear. And, of course, the UN wasn't finding weapons of mass destruction of any description.

Naturally Rumsfeld didn't listen. He had convinced himself so firmly of what he wanted to believe that he knew Tenet was wrong. This being the case, Tenet had to be punished.

So the Secretary of Defense called for a review of the CIA, which he knew would turn up grave institutional incompetence. How could it not be so?

And then his own hand would be strengthened as he continued his efforts to make the Defense Intelligence Agency the dominant player in the American intelligence world.

Rumsfeld's study was to take place only after the invasion, so that the CIA's prewar intelligence estimates could be compared what would certainly turn out, once we occupied Iraq, to be the facts.

Now that Rumsfeld's facts are being exposed as lies, however, it is Tenet who will look like a master spy and Rumsfeld who will be seen as a credulous fool. And naturally Tenet will charge ahead with the investigation, trying hard not to snigger in public.

When a man did something this stupid in Vietnam, GIs in their rough soldierly way would say, "Motherfucker stepped on his own dick, didn't he? You believe that shit?"

Posted by Jerome Doolittle at May 27, 2003 08:45 PM | TrackBack

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The "Bush Administration Manipulated Intelligence, May Have Known WMD Reports Were Fabricated" is actually piercing into the mainstream.

I just saw Koppel do a piece on this on "Nightline."

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British MP charges `Jewish cabal' is guiding Tony Blair

By Haaretz Staff

Veteran leftist British Labor MP Tam Dalyell has charged that Prime Minister Tony Blair was "being unduly influenced by a cabal of Jewish advisers," the Telegraph newspaper reported yesterday

The comment echoed remarks by U.S. Republican Patrick Buchanan, who was accused of anti-Semitism when in an article last March, he described a predominantely Jewish group of advisers to President Bush as "a cabal of polemicists and public officials [who] seek to ensnare our country in a series of wars that are not in America's interests."

The statement also coincided with publication of research showing that the number of anti-Semitic incidents in the United Kingdom rose by 75 percent during the first three months of 2003, according to a report issued by the Community Security Trust (CST), which says the increase was directly linked to the war in Iraq.

The Telegraph quoted an interview with Vanity Fair, in which the Labor MP named "Lord Levy, Tony Blair's personal envoy on the Middle East, Peter Mandelson, whose father was Jewish, and Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, who has Jewish ancestry, as three of the leading figures who had influenced Mr Blair's policies on the Middle East."

Dalyell told the Telegraph Saturday that he was "fully aware that one is treading on cut glass on this issue and no one wants to be accused of anti-Semitism but, if it is a question of launching an assault on Syria or Iran... then one has to be candid. I am not going to be labeled anti-Semitic. My children worked on a kibbutz. But the time has come for candor."

The Prime Minister, Mr Dalyell claimed, was also indirectly influenced by Jewish people in the Bush administration, including Richard Perle, a Pentagon adviser, Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, and Ari Fleischer, the President's press secretary.

"They very much have captured the ear of the President of the United States. I said [to Vanity Fair] I thought that Blair was very sympathetic to them. I cannot understand why," Dalyell said.

Mandelson said in response: "Apart from the fact that I am not actually Jewish, I wear my father's parentage with pride. As for Tam, he is as incorrigible as ever."

Lord Janner, a Labor peer and the chairman of the Holocaust Education Trust, said: "I think these comments are sad and unfounded. Tony Blair is his own man. He will follow advice if he considers it correct and not otherwise. He has been a good friend of the Jewish people and the Jewish state."

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Article published May 28, 2003

California's attorney general urges leniency for pot 'guru'

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer is urging a federal judge to be lenient when he sentences Ed Rosenthal, the self-described "Guru of Ganja" who was convicted on marijuana cultivation charges.

Rosenthal, 58, says he legally grew marijuana for medical use under a 1996 law approved by California voters, and was deputized by the city of Oakland to carry out that task. But U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer refused to allow a jury to hear that defense, and Rosenthal was prosecuted as a major drug supplier.

In a two-page letter submitted Tuesday, Lockyer asked Breyer to impose a sentence on June 4 that takes the California Compassionate Use Act of 1996 into account. That law, the attorney general wrote, "authorizes the possession or cultivation of marijuana for the personal medical purposes of the patient upon the written or oral recommendation or approval of a physician."

Rosenthal's prosecution underscored the federal government's position that medical marijuana is illegal, that it has no medical value and that the will of California voters has no affect on federal drug law.

The federal Probation Department is recommending he receive a 21-month prison term, according to court documents. The maximum term is 60 years. Prosecutors have not said how much time they are seeking and did not return a call Tuesday seeking comment.

Lockyer asked Breyer "to impose the minimum sentence allowed under the federal sentencing guidelines." Dennis Riordan, Rosenthal's attorney, said the lowest allowable term would be no prison time at all.

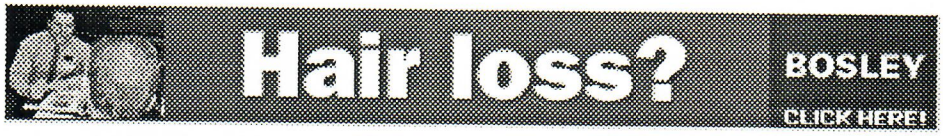
Meanwhile, nine of Rosenthal's 12 jurors also asked the judge Tuesday not to imprison Rosenthal. The panelists decried their own verdict after learning that Rosenthal was acting under the auspices of the city of Oakland's marijuana program.

"We feel strongly that Mr. Rosenthal deserves uninterrupted freedom because we convicted him without having all of the evidence," the nine jurors wrote Breyer.

Rosenthal once wrote the "Ask Ed" column for High Times magazine and has written books with titles including "The Big Book of Buds" and "Ask Ed: Marijuana Law. Don't Get Busted."

The case is United States v. Rosenthal, 02-0053.

Editors: David Kravets has been covering state and federal courts for a decade.



Developer sues Cantor for back rent

Tue May 27, 8:45 PM ET

By Christopher Grimes and Adrian Michaels in New York

Larry Silverstein, (pictured) the real estate developer who holds the lease on the World Trade Center, has filed suit against Cantor Fitzgerald for rent owed for August 1-September 10, 2001.

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Cantor, which lost 658 employees in the September 11 terrorist attacks, owes over $1m in back rent, according to Mr Silverstein's lawsuit.

Mr Silverstein continues to pay rent to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to maintain the World Trade Center lease. All the other major tenants have paid rent for the period prior to the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers, Mr Silverstein claims.

"We have commitments from all the other major tenants; this is the only tenant who has failed to address this matter," a spokesman for Mr Silverstein said. "Unfortunately we had to file this lawsuit."

Mr Silverstein's financial situation has been the subject of legal battles and speculation for months. His company took control of the WTC for $3.2bn shortly before the attacks and has since been battling to double the losses of over 20 insurers to more than $7bn. Mr Silverstein argues that because two aircraft hit separate buildings, he can make two claims and recover twice his $3.6bn coverage.

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In September a judge in New York granted judgment in favour of the arguments of three of the insurers that the terrorist attacks constituted one "occurrence".

Mr Silverstein plans to appeal that decision July 22 in a US court.

Meanwhile there is a separate insurance dispute over the rebuilding by Mr Silverstein of another part of the WTC complex, World Trade Seven.

Cantor Fitzgerald was criticised for being slow to pay benefits to relatives of employees killed in the tragedy. Only days after the attacks, the firm stopped sending paychecks to missing employees. There were also questions about payment of year-end bonuses.

But Howard Lutnick, chairman, later offered more generous financial plans for the families, including a plan to donate 25 per cent of the firm's profits to a fund for families.

As the leaseholder of the World Trade Center site, Mr Silverstein is also a major figure in the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan.

He has differed with city and state officials on the direction of the redevelopment, including New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Mr Bloomberg yesterday unveiled a $25m plan to build new parks and open spaces near the site of World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan. Work is to begin on 13 sites, with 8 parks to be completed within the next year. A design competition for a memorial is under way, with selection expected later in the year.

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